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Christmas Fear

by HENRY STOB

You will agree, I think, that if e are to celebrate Christmas worthily e must allow the day and its message lay hold, not merely on a part of us, ut on the whole of us — on our will nd our affections, but also on our ind.

As far as our affections go, the sea- n makes its own unique appeal to em. At this time of the year there is spirit abroad that has a way of in- nuating itself into the most shadowy annies of our soul, and kindling in e coldest hearts a little flame of armth and cheer. All of us are like crooge at times, but few of us manage be as impervious as he to the smile is season wears. We seem about this me to breathe an atmosphere more den with good-will and helpfulness an that of commoner days, and the halation, as by some occult magic, ises our affections to an altogether nusual height. The season moves us.

It moves our will as well as our emo- ons. When December comes we grow ordinately active. Little girls help other with the dishes, boys wash be- nd their ears, parents plot pleasant rprises for their children. A light ectric current seems to vitalize every ousehold, a subtle and pervading in- uence galvanizes all its members. The reets get filled with tramping feet nd the shops with eager purchasers. urse-strings seem everywhere to hang ore loosely, and the helping hand gets ld out often. Our wills respond obe- iently to the light and happy pressure the times.

But the mind — to what extent is it engaged by Christmas? How often in the bustle and excitement of the days that are the harbinger of Christmas do we reflect upon its real significance? How often do we stop to think? — Christmas has come to be an occidental institution. All western people celebrate the day, and our social forms and practices have taken on the rhythm of its annual return. But therein lurks a danger, the danger that the day of Christ will be lowered to the level of a holiday. To prevent this it is necessary to inquire, each year anew, after the fundamental significance of Christmas — its significance for the world and for ourselves. We must know that meaning, and incorporate it, if the emotional excitement and practical activity of the season is not to be vain. When we apprehend that meaning, and live by it, all the appendages of Christmas come to stand in a new and heavenly light. Then will and affections become exponents of Christ's own spirit, and God's gift becomes our inalienable possession.

* * *

One way to apprehend the meaning of Christmas is to observe the reference in the Lucan narrative to the fear that gripped the shepherds. Christmas is and ought to be a day of joy and light. Yet its light first shone at midnight, and its joy first came to men afraid. Is there not a revelation here of its enduring significance? I think there is.

There were shepherds abiding in the fields, we read, keeping watch over their flocks by night, and suddenly the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. It is to this fear that the first words of the heavenly herald had reference, and it is only against the background of this fear,

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I suggest, that Christmas joy can be pure and deep.

The herald said: Fear not. We might suppose that these words, standing there in the text, are not addressed to us. We might say: the shepherds actually feared and for them the comforting imperative, fear not, had relevance and meaning, but with the disappearance of their fear the imperative too fell away: it forms no essential part of the Christmas message, these words have no meaning for us.

This appears to be true, for who of us fears at Christmas, that we should be enjoined not to fear? Where is the Fear that can be truthfully called the Christmas Fear? Who of us fears when in the presence of our family we light our colored candles? Where is fear when in our thoughts we stand before the manger in which our Savior lay? Who fears in the presence of all these bells and carols? Who fears in the audition of the angels' chorus? It would seem that the herald's imperative is not for us. Here, it seems, is a Scripture word we can silently pass by.

Yet we may not pass it by. "Fear not" was spoken to the Shepherds long ago; "fear not" is spoken to you and to me at Christmas with all its original force. It speaks directly to our situation.

* * *

LET us not deceive ourselves. We all know how frequently we stand in the grip of fear. We are all alike in this (and those who appear most happy and secure form no exception) that we carry about with us wherever we go a great and secret fear, a fear whose tendrils reach out in all directions. We all resemble the shepherds in this that around us, as around them, the night is thick and black, and in that night we fear, as children fear the dark.

When we see the jealousy and might of nations we fear for our country. When we see the unprecedented traffic in arms we fear the unmitigable holocaust of war. We fear for our culture when from the East we see red hands stretched out threatingly toward it. We fear for our church when we notice the ever present forces of decay that gnaw at it.

And then we all have our personal and private fears. One fears his neighbor, the other fears himself. One fears old age and lonesomeness, another the tasks and responsibilities of maturity. One fears for his daily bread, another fears for his chances at success, and all of us fear the cold hand of death. The list is endless; each of us can elaborate. Each of us knows better than any other the cares and anxieties, the troubles and disappointments, the fears and travails that haunt and burden our particular lives.

But then — there is Christmas. Its message is for people in our situation. Its imperative is for such as you and me. Against our fears it places the angelic word: Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.

* * *

WHAT are these tidings? Not that every fear and anxiety shall now and henceforth be banished from our lives. The fighting and the overcoming of the particular fears that dog our footsteps is the moral task which God has left to us, which we can carry on indeed only through his grace, but which will occupy us unto the very end. What the angelic tidings say is this: that the way, previously closed, has now been opened, whereby the fear and dread, in which since his awful fall man has been held captive, can be in principle escaped.

What is this fear and dread other than the fear and dread of God? All our particular fears are but expressions of this central fear. Of God man had reason to be afraid. To be afraid of *things* is, like children, to be afraid of the dark; but to be a f r a i d of God, that is sinful man's natural lot and portion. For the Holy God is a consuming fire.

It was of God that the shepherds in Bethlehem's fields were afraid. It was not the darkness and the night that they feared, but the angel of God in the night. By his presence they surmised that God had come. How could they know he had not come in judgment? They knew they were sinners. They knew they had earned condemnation and death. This Presence then could be the angel of God who with a sharp two-edged sword guarded the gates of paradise, or the avenger who had come to slay.

But it was not. It was the herald of salvation. He announced that the God who might have come in judgment, in confirmation of our fears, had come in grace, to remove our fears. He said to those that had no right but to fear, fear not. Be not afraid, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people: for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

Here then, in this message, in this reality, the axe is laid to the root of our fears; here the fountains of pure joy are unstopped. The axe cuts where the fears are real, where the fears are the Fear of God; and the fountain flows copiously for those who, fearing, believe, and who, believing, say: Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing that is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.

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Fourth Annual Report

YOUR Journal staff has allowed itself the indulgence of a personal fireside chat with you once a year.

This is the Christmas season. We want first of all therefore to greet you in the Lord, and to express the heartfelt wish and prayer that the gift of His grace may abound abundantly to you in this year.

In preparing our December issue, we as a staff feel retrospective, introspective, and prospective. We like to look back over the *Journal* years, in upon ourselves, and forward to our 1955 responsibilities.

At the end of four years we can, we believe, say some things that we could not say at the beginning of them. One of them is that we are not the organ of a party, the mouthpiece of a faction, the manifesto of a movement, nor the spokesman for "an element" in the church. We knew this full well from the beginning, but some persons kept on regarding us that way, and, indeed, they could hardly be blamed.

They could hardly be blamed. For one thing we were introducing an independent paper into a church and community that had got used to official ecclesiastical organs as their medium of thought. The inference seemed to be that the independent journal meant to be a voice of protest. We disclaimed this in our opening editorial, but we could hardly expect everybody to be sure of it until they were convinced by the performance. We trust that our four years have proved it.

There is the further consideration that the period in which we began was not a "settled" period in our church and community. It was, rather, a "troubled" period. In this we as a church were but reflecting the ecclesiastical and general religious restlessness of the time. Catholicism, liberal Protestantism, and non-Reformed orthodox Protestantism were undergoing review, re-study, and change. It was natural that our church, too, should feel this restiveness, and that it should be reinvestigating itself in order in the end to reinforce itself. Moreover, it perhaps has not yet been determined whether a "settled" or a "troubled" period is best for the church.

ANYHOW, our *Journal* made its appearance first in such an unsettled period. The memory of defection and schism was still alive among us, and it disturbed us to see that our ecclesiastical kin in The Netherlands had undergone a major division. When, therefore, the doctrine of grace again became mooted among us, people wondered, and people got a little scared. They wondered whether there might not somewhere again be a group of theologians who meant to bump their heads against the imponderables once more at the cost eventually of a further splintering of orthodoxy. That the *Journal* should turn up at such a time was enough to suggest to some that an idea had now become a platform, that the platform would soon be a party, and that the party would want to win.

Again we could hardly blame some people for fearing this. They could not be sure, and they knew all too well the splintering ways of Reformed churches. There are times when, in view of the sub-sectioning of the Reformed churches people can hardly be blamed for almost preferring unity by way of official organs, and by way even of propaganda, to truth at the risk of difference of opinion and the taking of sides. Happily that is not the limit of the possibilities. It is also possible to have the truth and the unity together. It is to progress towards this last objective that we have from the first committed our efforts. Again we trust that our four years have indicated the sincerity of this intent.

NO DOUBT we as a staff have a sort of slant on things, a sort of mentality, which constitutes us a group of more or less *eensgezinden*. This would be true for any paper, and it is as true of an official ecclesiastical paper as it is of an independent one that there is a mentality at work at the head of it which gives it direction. We too have such unity of mind. Some time one of us may very well take another one to task for mistaken argument. Moreover, none of us means to talk in a mealy-mouthed way, mincing his words, as though he feared he were not hitting the common denominator of community opinion. We do mean, by our staff slants on things or our staff mentality, to keep a spirit and identity in the *Journal* that has a recognizable character.

A year ago we had the impression that we staff members were writing rather too much, and that our contributors were writing too little. A few people told us this, and we tended to agree. We promised in that "Third Annual Report" to broaden the base of our contributors. Now — wouldn't you just know it? — some few people have suggested that the staff members are writing too little, and that the *Journal* was better when it was practically staff-written.

SOME PAPERS carry the names of their contributing members on or under their mastheads. Since, in the interest also of economy, we do not do this, we are eager to set down here the names of those who wrote for us this year, and who thus greatly contributed to make the *Journal* what it is. They were:

N. H. Beversluis
Clarence Boersma
F. F. Bruce
William P. Brink
Henry Bruinooge
John Daling
Cecil De Boer
Harold Dekker
Lester De Koster
Simon De Vries
Lillian V. Grissen
Albert Huisjen
Dirk Jellema
William C. Kiessel
Carl Kromminga
John Kromminga
Clifton Orlebeke
Elco Oostendorp
Abel Poel
Henry Schultze
Lewis B. Smedes
John Timmerman
Idzerd Van Dellen
J. G. Vanden Bosch
Peter L. Van Dyken
Clarence Van Ens
Dick L. Van Halsema
Leonard Verduin
John Weidenaar

Fourth Annual Report — Continued

It would be pleasant to have these names, and the many others who contributed significantly in former years, always under our masthead. It is a pleasure at least this once to signalize them thus. We trust that they enjoy their work as much as we do ours, and that they are as confident as we are of its usefulness to our readers.

Two of the names listed overhead seem to us to deserve a second mention. They have been with us consistently almost from the beginning and have by this time run up an impressive group of articles. In fact, their pens are quite as busy as our own. One of them is Professor J. G. Vanden Bosch. He has already given us seven sketches of men who counted in our Christian Reformed past. We are grateful to him for this human approach to our church, for keeping this historical perspective in our *Journal*, and for snatching from the brutal hand of time these stories of the faithful in our ecclesiastical past. Professor Vanden Bosch's sketches were the following:

Leendert Rietdyk — Dec. 1952
Johannes Groen — March, 1953
Douwe J. Vander Werp — Nov. 1953
Geert E. Boer — Jan. 1954
Leonard P. Brink — May, 1954
Koene Vanden Bosch — Sept. 1954
Geerhardus Vos — Nov. 1954

The other *regular* was Leonard Verduin. We have appreciated his active research in early Reformation history and his challenging theses in the area of Reformation-Democratic works and ways. He, too, is moving towards a collectable series of articles. They were:

Communism — God's Servant?
Church and State: Historical Survey
The Fallen Church
After the Reformation
The Absolute Antithesis
Biblical Christianity and Cultural Compositism
Luther the Fortunate
Luther Was Not Alone

Three further acknowledgements of indebtedness remain. A major one is to Mr. William B. Eerdmans, Sr. and to the William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company and to the staff of that firm. Anyone who has had anything printed in our days knows that getting out such a paper as ours is expensive. It costs more than comes in. We appreciate the fact, therefore, that we would probably not be a going concern if it were not for our publisher. For this inestimably valuable aid our sincerest thanks are due.

We again feel that we owe you as our readers a lot. Your subscriptions are a vote of confidence for us. We interpret it to mean that you like our objectivity, benefit from what we write, and trust us with the management of this particular piece of independent journalism. May we say that we need every one of you. We advertise very little. We do very little nudging and needling. We present our annual proposition to you, and that is that. We count on you to take the opportunity when it serves. We count on you to return your renewal after you read this. We hope many of you will get up a kind of gift list. Three dollars for any two subscriptions is not much. It is the price of a breakfast, not of a dinner. We do trust that you will tell us at once by your returned renewals and subscriptions that you want our paper to operate in our church and community.

We hoped at some points along the line that there might be five thousand people who would care for a full discussion, an objective analysis, a thorough probing of issues of moment in our church life. It seems that this figure is high. It seems that those who want to read a little, and reflect a little, on problems that confront the Reformed Christian in our life and time are fewer than five thousand. This is regrettable but it does seem to be the fact. Of course, when one compares the number of those who read *Atlantic* and *Harper's* with the number of those who read *Reader's Digest* and the *Saturday Evening Post* the ratio is very unfavorable to the former too. We are content if we have what we call the reflective element in our church. If this be only two or three thousand we shall be glad to serve such a group and write as well as we can for them. Even so, you will all have to be prompt and helpful if we are to have our two thousand by New Year's.

Last year we said that we had a number of people in foreign countries who might like to receive the *Journal*. We suggested that some of you might care to sponsor the subscriptions of these people. Some ten or a dozen of you responded at once. That was a cheering thing. The result was that we had some fifty or more foreign readers for whose judgment we had high respect. This raised our editorial morale. We sent our gracious donors the names of those we had selected. We hope that some of these donors will care to serve in this way again, and that others will care to also. And of course you may choose your own names from our gross list if you care to do so.

Our third acknowledgement is an acknowledgement of the favor of God. All Kingdom work is a pleasure under his blessing. Ours has thus been a pleasure also. Irrespective of whether this year be a "settled" or a "troubled" one, we are confident that we can in obedience to the Word and Spirit, serve our God and our church usefully with our journal of Reformed comment and opinion. We search our hearts and say that we strive to submit ourselves to the leading of the Lord. We pray He will bless our church in 1955, and that He will use our efforts also for deepening and extending his church and Kingdom.

H. Z. for The Staff

The Staff and Publisher of

THE REFORMED JOURNAL

extend to every reader sincere wishes for a Happy Chrstmas and Blessed New Year!

The Christian Reformed Church and the American World

by HARRY R. BOER

THERE is no problem which today stands more acutely and more concretely before the Christian Reformed Church than the problem of her relationship to the American world. We are only two short years away from 1957. In that year we shall celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of our denominational existence. The materials for both gratitude and self-congratulation are at hand. We began with such and such a number of churches, now they number thus and thus. We began as a small movement in western Michigan, now our churches are spread from coast to coast in the United States and in Canada. We have so many Christian grade schools, so many high schools, a college, a seminary, a junior college movement, institutions of this kind and that kind, a weekly and a monthly press, missions from Africa to Japan, and so on.

But Where Are Fiorello and Katy?

THERE is one subject, however, on which no report will be made in 1957, and with respect to which there will be neither gratitude by the humble nor self-praise by the proud. If a report is made on it, it will be made in passing, with a nod that meets the formal requirement of recognition, but yet keeps the subject at a distance. Hopefully there will be some who will refer to it repentantly. This subject relates to the place which the Christian Reformed Church occupies as an integral part of American Church and community life. More specifically, it relates to the virtual absence of such names as Martin Hammersmith, Roland Elston, Mary Janovitch, Fiorella Tonelli, Jules Leclerc, and Katy O'Brien from our church rosters.

We have little or nothing to report here. And that is a very serious matter. We must remember that the subject of the 1957 celebration is not a society of men and women who may set their own aims and goals of achievement. It is not a human organization that may outline its own program of action. It is not a religious fellowship which may work for certain self-determined ends. The subject of the 1957 celebrations will be a particular manifestation of *the Church of Jesus Christ.* This Church is a *universal* Church. This does *not mean simply* that the Church of Jesus Christ in its total manifestation in all times and places is a universal body. It does *not mean* that there are and have been all manner of parochial, local, provincial manifestations of the body of Christ which were not universal in their nature, but that *all together* they form a universality. It means that *every* local manifestation of the body of Christ is in its heart and nature a revelation of the one, holy, *universal* Church. That is what we confess every Sunday. It means that in Christ there are no white men, no Negroes, no Indians, no Chinese, no Hollanders, no Americans, no rich, no poor, no Republicans, no Democrats, no Jews, no gentiles, no masters, no servants. In Christ there is only the new humanity, the new creation, all of whose members have been recreated in his image.

The Church in history is called to reflect this universality. It can, in the nature of the case, achieve only an approximation of this ideal. A church in Holland will consist of Hollanders, a church in Nigeria of Nigerians, a congregation in a country district will be composed of farmers, and a congregation in an industrial suburb will consist of factory workers. But that is not the point. If a church is conscious of her universal nature she will realize that her Dutch, Nigerian, agrarian or industrial complexion is essentially accidental and she will be *ready* to express her universality as place and opportunity permit. Where this *readiness* exists God accepts the intention for the realization.

It is at this point that I have my doubts about the Christian Reformed Church. Does she seriously *want to be* a genuine expression of the universal Church of Christ? Specifically, this means: Are we seriously trying to become an *American* church so that we can be of maximum service to Christ in the country where we have been given a name and a place?

A few weeks ago I was browsing in a second hand bookstore and came across a volume entitled, *Tercentenary Studies, Reformed Church in America,* 1628-1928, published by the General Synod of the RCA. Interested, I turned to the chapter dealing with the development of the RCA in western Michigan. It was written by the Rev. Siebe C. Nettinga and it speaks a passing but significant word about the separation of 1857. The writer indicates his reluctance to enter upon the subject, but observes,

> Suffice it to say, that to us it seems that the fundamental question at issue was that of Americanization. Should they [the seceders] reproduce a little Holland on this side of the sea, or should they identify themselves with American ideals and customs and language and all that belongs to true Americanism — stripped of all other questions that was the fundamental issue. p. 458.

Twelve years ago, when I entered the ministry, I would have rejected this interpretation of the secession of 1857 without further ado. At that time I accepted as a full explanation and justification of the secession the doctrinal grounds that were addressed in support of it. Moreover, I had not then yet been exposed to the many influences outside the Christian Reformed Church that have since impinged upon me. Nor did I then have the insight into the mentality of our Church that I have later gained. I am not prepared to say even now that Nettinga's explanation is a full one. But I believe that it contains a large element of truth which, while it may not be pleasant for Christian Reformed ecclesiastical patriotism to contemplate, must be faced squarely if we are to become a fruitful Church on the big American scene.

Just What Is Home *Mission* Work?

WHEN I consider Christian Reformed home mission work there is, it seems to me, a great deal in it that has not even the slightest connection with *missionary* activity. I see no point at

all in dubbing as "missionaries" ministers whose task in life it is to move about Christian Reformed churches making two congregations out of one, or in organizing a new congregation out of members of surrounding congregations. We may seek to soothe our consciences by calling this mission work, but let it be said freely, frankly, and openly, that such a use of the word "missions" is improper. This work may be good and useful, but it bears no more relation to missions than catechism teaching or leading a men's society do.

We have sent a number of ministers to Canada under the authority of the Home Missions Board to help Christian immigrants organize a congregational life. This work, too, was good, and not only useful but necessary. But what relation does this activity, barring peripheral contacts with the unchurched, bear to *mission* work? Small wonder that some of the immigrants have taken offense at the fact that the ministers sent over to help them are called "missionaries."

The simple and undeniable fact is that our whole tradition of "home missions" involves a predominant concern with organizing Christian Hollanders or Christians of Dutch descent into congregations. This work needed doing. It is the way in which the CRC grew. But is not the time more than ripe to give a new meaning and a new content to the term "home missions"?

Recently one of our home missionaries, reviewing in *The Banner* a seven-year period of service, wrote,

> Most of this work involved church extension; that is, the gathering of the scattered of the faith into a nucleus for congregations, giving direction in building programs and the calling of regular pastors.

Then he adds,

> But we also had some wonderful opportunities for evangelism in every field in which we labored. (*The Banner*, Oct. 1, 1954, p. 1197).

This description is, unless I err, typical of all our home mission work. The "scattered of the faith" — they have been our missionary concern. Not the scattered of the Christian faith, but the scattered of the Reformed faith, especially if they have Dutch blood in them. As a sort of side interest, of which much seldom comes, are the "opportunities for evangelism." This is our tradition and we are loyal to it to the present day. But I ask, where does our *missionary* concern come to expression? How shall we in this way come to reflect the *universal* Church? Why must the Church that now exists ninety-eight years in the country called America remain a *Dutch* - American body? Does our history, perhaps even more than our birth, vindicate Nettinga's judgment? And can we not break through this history and endeavor to answer more fully to our true purpose and nature?

There is no reason in Scripture, there is no reason in doctrine, there is no good reason in the whole wide world, why the Christian Reformed Church should not endeavor to become a genuinely *American* Church. There is *every reason* why she should. I shall not belabor the obvious. How destructive the refusal to recognize the obvious can be, the following illustration may serve to make plain:

Frank was one of the finest Christian marines I met in the service. He was a Presbyterian, and a well formed and educated young man. Frank came through Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan and Tinian. He was a regular attendant at my services. I saw him again at the Marine Demobilization Center, Great Lakes, Chicago. He told me that he wanted to become a minister, and he wanted to prepare for the ministry at Calvin College and Seminary. He liked my textual way of preaching which, I had told him, was characteristic of all our mininsters because that is the way in which we had been trained. He lived near Chicago and invited me to have dinner at his home sometime and meet his folks. Three weeks later he called me and we made the date definite. Meanwhile, I wrote to the president of Calvin College and asked him to send Frank a catalogue.

The evening of the visit came. I went, we had a pleasant time, but the whole night not a word was breathed about Frank's going to Calvin. When he finally took me to the train I said to him, "Look here, Frank, how about all that enthusiasm for study at Calvin? I haven't heard a word about it all night."

"Well, chaplain," he replied in an embarrassed manner that at the same time betokened relief at being able to get something off his chest, "that catalogue you sent for came. My dad took one look at the list of professors and students that's found in it, and he looked up at me and said, 'What's the matter? You want to become a Dutchman?' I didn't know how to answer that one, and besides, I feel he's sort of right. I don't feel I should take my training in schools that seem to be so strongly under the influence of a Church that has not yet been assimilated into the American community."

And that ended that.

Neighborhood Evangelism and the "Branch-Church"

THE NEIGHBORHOOD evangelism program that is in effect in a number of Christian Reformed communities and surrounding areas is a protest against Christian Reformed churchiness and missionary indifference. It arises out of a felt need to bring the gospel to the unchurched, an effort for which Christian Reformed churches have historically had little eye. It is therefore significant that this movement is in its origins, and is still to a large extent today, primarily a laymen's movement. It is speaking an open secret when I say that a number of Christian Reformed ministers feel embarrassed by it. It disturbs the even tenor of the traditional ecclesiastical pattern. We ministers just haven't been brought up to handle a movement like that. At the same time, it is hard to ignore it because, after all, every minister, at least in theory, believes in missions. I myself have rather serious misgivings with respect to the neighborhood evangelism program now in effect, as my article in the October *Reformed Journal* will indicate. But these misgivings arise least of all from the fact that "outsiders," unaccustomed to Christian Reformed ways, are making contact with our Church. They arise out of considerations of the structure and methods of the program.

Even so, I must in all honesty state that I no longer feel so distant from this movement as I once did. I see here a bold willingness to enter into American life. I also discern a remarkable parallel between this movement and the rise of missionary interest in Europe and in England in the 18th and early 19th centuries. That interest arose outside the official Church circles, was at first condemned and even scorned by Church leaders, it continued to press forward, and was finally accepted by

the Church. In various ways correspondances to this development can be found in our situation. I hope, therefore, that what I have to say below, critical though it is, will not be read as simply a criticism, but as an effort to help.

The neighborhood evangelism program, particularly as it comes to expression in the so-called "Branch-Church," violates, in my opinion, one of the fundamental principles of mission work laid down in the New Testament. This principle is that *the Church increases by additions to existing congregations and by the establishing of new congregations.* There is in the New Testament no in-between stage that is neither Church nor not-Church. The New Testament teaches that converts, if not gathered into already existing churches, must be organized *as soon as possible into fully constituted churches.* Had the apostles harbored the same suspicions concerning the commitment and loyalty of converts and concerning their ability to govern themselves that we harbor, the larger part of the Roman Empire would not have been dotted with Christian churches in the brief time of less than two generations. It is safe to say that if the early church had applied the current Christian Reformed home mission or neighborhood evangelism methods Christianity would have died at birth. But the early Church did not use our methods. And why not? She did not because the early Church had a far greater appreciation of the power and efficacy of the Holy Spirit than we do. She believed that converts, instructed in the essentials of the faith, gifted with the Holy Spirit, and in continuation instructed in the meaning of the faith, were able to order their own ecclesiastical house. This we do not believe. We believe in ordering the lives of the converts from above, and from a distance. The early Church gave to her converts liberty and self-government. We withhold liberty, govern from a distance, and when we give liberty we give it slowly and grudgingly. That is the difference between the missionary approach of the early Church and of our Church.

It was not long after Paul found a response to his message that there was a church in the place where he found this response. And this church was constituted *fully* a church with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities pertaining thereunto. Lydia and the Philippian jailor did not have their "membership papers" in Antioch, and the Antiochean Christians did not have them in Jerusalem. When the gospel found acceptance in a place, the apostles inspected it, or they sent a trusted person to do so, to see if it was from the Spirit. Then they left it to develop under the care of some trusted leader. Often the church was just a house meeting, but it was the Church, the Church of Jesus Christ. That is the way in which the faith spread 1900 years ago.

* * *

CONSIDER what objections the church in Jerusalem might have raised against this method. What did these new converts know about the Old Testament? What appreciation did they have for the laws and the customs observed by the Jewish church? The church in Jerusalem held to all the ceremonies of the law, there was decorum, ritual, solemnity, fasting and feasting, and the observance of all the legal minutiae. The churches among the gentiles, on the other hand, knew nothing about these things. Their meetings were sometimes downright disorderly. If the apostles had delegated a member of the Christian Reformed Home Missions Board to see if the believers at Corinth were ready for organization he would unquestionably have reported back that things were in a very bad state there, that there was need for discipline by the apostolic consistory, and that in any case there could be no question of organization.

Paul saw things differently. He organized a church in Corinth. He accepted the risks of liberty. His sanctified risks had sanctified pay-offs. For him the Church was not a comfortable middle-class socio-religious community in which newcomers were welcome if they knew how to observe all the laws and the customs. For him the Church was a Church that dealt with the essentials of the faith and that reckoned with the power of the Spirit. Where these obtained the way into the Church was open. There were no other requirements. First came discipling, then church organization, then perfecting by instruction and growth in grace.

Now it is strange that when these things are said in Christian Reformed (and other) circles, one hears the objection: "O, yes, that's all very true, but that was in *Paul's* day. That was 1900 years ago, and a wholly different situation. We are not Paul, and this is 1954, and we don't work in Asia Minor but in the U.S.A." In this way Paul and all the exemplary and methodological value God has given us in him for missionary purposes are brushed with one easy remark off the ecclesiastical table. In this way otherwise staunch defenders of the infallible Word replace God's infallible guidance with their own wisdom which, judging by the results, is far from wise.

For we know what Paul accomplished. But what have we accomplished? The early Church threw open the doors of the Church to the gentiles and the greatest blossoming period in the history of the Church resulted. Why can't we throw open the doors of the Church to Americans? Why must there be all these safeguards that kill all enthusiasm and warmth by the veiled suspicions they convey? Why are sizable groups of believers that have met for years not organized as churches? I've served congregations as a student that never had a minister and did not expect to have one soon. They were fully organized churches. But, *they were Hollanders.* Then it's all right. They know the laws and the customs. They can be trusted. They won't do the unexpected.

Why must believers in a chapel near Grand Rapids have their "membership papers" in a Grand Rapids church, and why must they cross half the town every Sunday morning to worship in that church instead of meeting in their own place of worship and under their own leader? Why must synods and synodical committees bend their collective minds over an Order for Neighborhood Evangelism? If this is officially the work of congregations and classes why must synod bind this work with its decrees?

The answer to this question is not far to seek. We fear the unusual. We have lent sacred sanction to historically risen ecclesiastical and social patterns. People having the same Spirit we have, but coming from wholly different backgrounds, might upset the ecclesiastical applecart. They might shout "Hallelujah" in church. They might not see the need of catechism classes right away. They might not care for men's society or for ladies' aids. What *would* we do in such cases. I suspect that we should do the same thing the Lord does with our highly developed selves: Be patient. Very patient. If the Spirit is there and the word is faithfully administered everything'll be all right. As it is, "outsiders" are welcome, but first they must

give evidence over an extended period of time that they fit into our spiritual categories. What all this means is that we will receive converts to Christ, but only when they have first become proselytes to the Christian Reformed Church.

But this is precisely the method of Church expansion that the apostles most emphatically rejected.

* * *

Place Them at Liberty!

HOW THEN shall we perform our home mission and neighborhood evangelization work? I can see no difference in principle and in basic execution between this work and the work of foreign missions. In foreign missions this is the basic pattern: We send out a missionary. He preaches the gospel. When there are believers he baptizes them. Believers live their Christian lives under mutual spiritual oversight and under the guidance of the missionary. He administers the sacraments. As soon as there are sufficient believers to organize a church, a church is organized. Elders are chosen. The church exists. Sooner or later she will have her own pastor. From the missionary and from the church and from her members individually the witness goes out to other areas. The church is established and grows.

There is no question of "membership papers" of the converts in an American church. There is no question of a "Branch-Church." There is no question of the consistory of the sending church exercising discipline over delinquent converts. These and other impedimenta just do not exist, and the work flourishes the more because of their absence.

But the closer we get to the home base the smaller this freedom becomes and the more extensive becomes the exercise of our missionary imperialism. Evidence enough of this is the Christian Reformed Indian mission field in the western U.S.A. Indian converts have about as much liberty to be themselves as an embowled gold-fish has to swim away into the freedom of a forest brook. One need only read the stipulations approved by the Synod of 1954 for the relationship of the Indian Church (which does not yet exist) to the Christian Reformed Church to discover how complete our domination of their spiritual life is and intends to be. The reason for this is made crystal clear. Our Indian brethren must fit into the Christian Reformed pattern. There will first be an "associate membership" with the Christian Reformed Church. The purpose of this preliminary stage is, among other things, "To allow the native church to develop sufficiently to meet the standards of the Christian Reformed Church Order as to membership, holding of office, and qualifications for the ministry." When they successfully pass this period of "associate membership" they will achieve the "ultimate" (in very black print) goal of becoming fully constituted "Christian Reformed" (also in very black print) churches. This is the happy ideal, the *summum bonum*, laid away for the tribally conscious nomadic Navaho who comes to Christ via the Christian Reformed mission. Not that the Navahos should come to manifest the body of Christ is our supreme concern, not even that they be formed into a church that shall occupy its place with other Christian Reformed churches in our denomination. No, that they become a *Christian Reformed* church, with full knowledge of the laws and the customs, Church Order and all. *That* is the aim, the *ultimate* aim.

It is but natural that in the immediate vicinity of the sending churches the strictures should be the heaviest. This is the area of greatest danger to the existing ecclesiastical patterns. Here, too, supervision and the ultimate in protection can be exericsed. The great protective means that has been devised to take people into the Church and yet not to take them into the Church is the invention or the importation of what we call the "Branch-Church." This, plus the spirit of excessive concern for the protection of the traditional forms of our church life, is what stands in the way of a healthy and fruitful missionary witness in our many communities.

* * *

THE PATH we have so far followed, effective though it has been in keeping the Christian Reformed Church a compact Dutch-American community, has only one defect. Our missionary effort remains sterile, relatively fruitless, and on the whole quite frustrating. There is no large movement of men to Christ via our witness, and least of all do churches come into being. Where men are gained for Christ they are placed in ambiguous ecclesiastical relationships that endanger their continued interest in the new-found faith. Do not speak to me here about the perseverance of the saints. The Lord will get His own to heaven. Even our bumbling methods cannot prevent that. I am speaking of *our responsibility* with respect to the spiritual and psychological laws that govern the relations of Christians to the instituted Church of Christ in this life.

Can we not for the sake of Christ and the increase of His universal Church relinquish our fears and trust His word? Is our concern to protect the Christian Reformed status quo worth being poor in fruits to present to Christ? Is it wise for us to be wiser than the Holy Spirit who directed the work described in Acts and who caused that work to be recorded in scripture, and that *for our profit*, as the scriptures say. Are we not, in our deep concern to save ourselves, seriously exposed to the danger of losing what we have? They who lose their life for Christ's sake *and for the gospel's* (Mk. 8:35) will *save* it. Finding by losing, living by dying, growing rich by becoming poor, being filled by emptying self — that is the law of the kingdom. So long as we fear to take Martin Hammersmith, Katy O'Brien, and all the others, into our ecclesiastical circle, or so long as in the interest of an unscriptural ecclesiastical concern we withhold from them the liberty we enjoy ourselves — so long we will violate this law and invite the imposition of its penalties.

There is, it seems to me, a very real possibility of ushering our home mission and neighborhood evangelism programs into a period of real fruitlessness and service. But then we shall have to listen much less than we now do to the counsels of ecclesiastical prudence, and much more than we now do to the counsels of duty as the New Testament makes them known to us. These counsels are clear. We need only ask for the courage of faith to walk in them.

* * *

I WANT to close these observations with the expression of a hope and of a suggestion. I sincerely hope that the majesty of the task of completing the body of Christ in our local environ-

ments will increasingly appeal to us as a Church and as a ministry, as the task of perfecting the already existing body has long had an appeal for us. No Church that is not fully missionary in her ministry and in her members can be said to answer adequately to the purpose for which Christ has placed her in the world.

My suggestion is, that we seriously consider the desirability of extending ordination to mature and competent evangelists who have worked in the heat of the day to build up groups of believers. *All believers* have a right to a full and natural church life. This is now in particular cases being withheld from them. It seems to me a contradictory situation when evangelists may break the bread of life on the Lord's day, instruct the youth, comfort the sick and bury the dead, but may not administer the sacraments or lift their hands in blessing over the flock that they have nurtured into being. Perhaps their ordination would also hasten the day of emergence of a responsible eldership in the groups they are now serving.

I am fully aware that some may greet this suggestion as an easy way into the ministry. I am also aware that some will see here a threat to the academic integrity of the ministry. Still others will envision the specter of the Reformed Bible Institute entering upon the role of a Bible School seminary for churches arising out of neighborhood evangelism and home mission work. All of these dangers are real. I do not minimize them but acknowledge them. But I am thinking not of a possible future threat to ministerial integrity, but of the *present need* of groups of believers who should be fully constituted churches and fully served churches but are not.

When we do what present duty seems to require, future contingencies have a way of taking care of themselves. I am also mindful of the Holy Spirit as a Spirit of integrity who will restrain men from a cheap seeking after ministerial office, and the Church from granting such office. Moreover, I regard this as a passing stage to better things. For I count on a Spirit-inspired obedience to the Spirit of witness who will constrain men to prepare for the home mission ministry in such numbers that the full-time evangelist as we now know him will yield his place to men who have had full training.

All these things we can do, all these things God will bless, if we will devaluate the Dutch element in our tradition, if we will be less concerned about the Christian Reformed Church, and more concerned about the universal Church as that should come to expression *in* the Christian Reformed Church. All these things we will surely do, and that with success and blessing, *when we follow the pattern of missionary witness laid down in the New Testament.*

The Sudan United Mission

II — Its Evangelistic Endeavors

by LILLIAN V. GRISSEN

"Ekklesiyar Kristi A Sudan" today occupies an important place on the agenda of any regional church council, branch field council, or united field council of the Sudan United Mission. The Sudan United Mission, evangelical and interdenominational, is seeking the best way to establish unity among the many churches which have been established during the fifty years of its history. "The Church in the Sudan" has been the aim of the SUM since its inception. Today the leaders, pastors and elders, black men and white, are united in their desire to unify the many churches into one fellowship if it can be done without sacrificing the doctrines and beliefs to which they are pledged to remain faithful.

The history of an organization is the history of its members. Many of the missionaries who gave their lives during the early years of the SUM would weep for joy could they see the fruits of their labors. Although their names are not carried in history books along with victorious generals and with famous kings and presidents,

there's a legion that never was listed,
that carries no colors nor crest,

but—split in a thousand detachments
is breaking the road for the rest.
(author unknown)

Even the early missionary learned (as new missionaries must still often learn today) that the work of a missionary did not consist merely of sitting under a palm tree, open Bible in hand, preaching all day to naked savages who were eager to listen. For the main, the early missionary's diary was one of distress, discouragement and disappointment. How he groped for language! The gulf between white man and black is deep and difficult. The white man is a "foreigner." The Mohammedan has a great advantage in this respect. His civilization, dress, manner and way of thought is very similar to that of the African. It was necessary for the pioneers not only to learn strange and tongue-tiring words and sounds, and think "black" thoughts, but theirs was the additional task of injecting and ingrafting into a pagan barbarism new and cultured Christian thoughts. For the native to learn foreign words for "gospel," "salvation," "grace," "Comforter," etc. would make them merely parrots. Actually, the language had to be "christianized." Interpreters did not prove too successful. When an interpreter is used between two nations previously christianized both are familiar with christian thought and expression, but this was not true of the primitive African.

Trekking, compound visiting, marketplace preaching, prayer-hut services, and personal, repeated contacts with individuals and groups comprised the methods applied in virgin territory. Work among the women was nearly impossible since Moslems make virtual prisoners of their women. Although the early workers knew the manner and method of the apostles of Mohammed, they, the messengers of Christ, were unable to follow them. Oh, if only all of us felt the personal urge to witness as the Moslem does!

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Look down the dusty road, and see the peddler coming with his donkey or small boy loaded with cloth, leather goods, mirrors or knives, and a tell-

* The first article in this series appeared in the November issue of the *Journal*.

The Sudan United Mission — Continued

tale kettle perched on top. He enters a pagan village, and deposits himself and his goods under a tree. Casually and nonchalantly he toys with his wares, and when curiosity has invited sufficient numbers of lookers, he announces that he will be "sitting down" in the village for a couple of days.

Tactfully, he visits the chief and gives him a trinket, nominal in cost, but attractive and valuable in the eyes of the simple people. The slowness of beginning business is of no concern, and his patience is soon rewarded. After a couple of days, when fear and suspicion of the villagers have abated, business becomes brisk. Three days later he leaves, as unobtrusively as he came, but considerably enriched in fowl and money.

It is a couple of months later, and we see him coming again. He is greeted not with the curiosity accorded a stranger, but as an old friend. The chief treats him more generously, and becomes the recipient of more gifts. Slyly the peddler includes a charm containing a verse from the Koran. Often the gift includes a Mohammedan gown, which the chief proudly dons. The transformation has begun!

Later the chief, out of simple curiosity watches the trader perform his daily rites and ablutions, and shyly, without thought as to the meaning, begins imitating him. Now thoroughly fascinated he asks to be taught to repeat a few of the Hausa prayers. The words are quite foreign and incomprehensible, but it really doesn't matter. The whole religion is permeated with mysterious words and signs.

The transformation is soon completed. There is no actual conversion. The chief — and his family — (wives are only chattels) have been won, and the subjection of the entire tribe usually follows in due course. While the conversion is only superficial, the children will be brought up in the faith, and will be sincere, and fanatical.

Thus the opposition has multiplied since the Arab first penetrated Africa with his doctrine so diabolically different from salvation through Jesus Christ.

* * *

THE EARLY years were not without fruit, however. Individuals came forth confessing His name, but after twenty years the actual statistics showed less than 200 baptisms. Less than two hundred baptisms in the entire area, yes — but five churches had been organized, with a total membership of ninety souls. It was the first sharply defined step towards the goal of the indigenous church.

Immediately elders were given assignments and responsibilities which served to strengthen their characters and the Church. The missionary counseled closely and strongly, but the burden of the care of Christians, examination of candidates for baptism, encouraging enquirers, plus the burden of the heathen, became the task of the Church from then on, and not primarily and exclusively the task of the missionary.

The application of indigenous principles became an SUM mission policy when the principles were agreed upon at the Wukari Missionary Conference in 1923. It was a drastic development; the training school at Wukari was closed down and efforts were united to establish the principles adopted. Precedence had walled itself securely, and changes in method brought bitterness and complaint among the people. Goals seemed unattainable, but conviction did not waver and the policy of the SUM in its Jubilee year remains the same.

During the year 1924 the SUM had its first native "convention" and the honor for this "first" goes to Lupwe. Work was laid aside for a week to enable all to attend the spiritual conferences. These conferences were held under the able direction of Miss Johanna Veenstra, the name well known and beloved by those who knew her and of her.

After thirteen years of unstinted, and God-glorifying service, Miss Veenstra died in 1933. She was the first European to be buried in the cemetery at Vom. Although her years of service did not number so many as several of her colleagues, the impact of her work was felt throughout the entire SUM, and her death was mourned by all. She lived to see the day of actual fruit upon her work in that a church was organized in the Takum area in 1930.

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THE CHAIN of mission stations from the Niger to the Nile, which had been stated as the goal of the organizers of the SUM, was almost realized by 1935. Only a lack of roads in certain places made it impossible for one to travel by motor from the Niger to the Nile, stopping each night at an SUM mission station. This realization only stirred the SUM to greater heights, and to expansion into unsettled territories. Progress became somewhat swifter since that time as the results of the joint aids of medicine and education were becoming more evident. In addition, travel by air and rail made missionaries more mobile, and improvement of roads and bridges made hitherto inaccessible places reachable for the telling of the Gospel story.

Efforts to secure leadership from among the Christians were initiated and continued with the increase in the number of Christians. Certain worthy Africans, selected because of their spiritual stature and qualifications, and not their academic ability, were trained, and today throughout the area served by the SUM there are eleven ordained native pastors. The Lupwe area has been blessed in having one, Pastor Istifanus, among its number. Pastor David Lot, also of the SUM, is a member of the Nigerian House of Representatives. That his presence and activities in this important position may serve as a leavening influence may well become an earnest petition in the prayers of fellow Christians at home.

The Church was encouraged from the beginning to send out its own missionaries and evangelists. In our own area of the Sudan, the first "foreign" missionaries were sent out from the Takum district in 1943, to the Tigum and Ndoro tribes of our Eastern region (the area worked by Rev. Robert Becker).

* * *

IN RECENT YEARS the work of evangelization has confronted opposition of a type different from that facing the pioneers. There is a rise of materialism and nationalism, and the first love of many newly-born Christians waxes lukewarm. Missions are an accepted element by the government, and with the cooperation of the government both medical and educational endeavors have progressed throughout the area under the jurisdiction of the SUM. This social development, however, constitutes a danger as well as an opportunity, in that the tremendous amount of work undertaken tends to crowd out the work of evangelization. This danger does not, however, loom unrealized before the SUM.

The rise of nationalism has served also as a warning to the church and the missionaries who counsel it. This constitutes one of the many reasons for the desire to establish the "Ekklesiyar Kristi A Sudan." The days of the white man are numbered in Africa also, and it is the task of the Mission to estabish an indigenous church, vigorous and living, so that the time may come when the white man shall have made himself so dispensable that, with the help and blessing of God, the blessed news may be carried forth unaided by the "Ekklesiyar Kristi A Sudan."

The People of God and the Body of Christ

by CARL KROMMINGA*

THE RECOGNITION of the Covenant of Grace and its implications for the people of God is one of the marks of a living Calvinistic community. The confession of covenant truth and the attempt to realize its implications are evident in "our" Calvinistic community in America. We are, or at least strive to be, deeply conscious of the fact that God is our God and the God of our children, and that we are the people of God. We seek to cultivate a vital conviction that we, *by God's grace*, are God's people.

Can it be said that we are also deeply conscious of the fact that the church is the body of Christ? Are we convinced that citizens of the kingdom of heaven are also members of the body of Christ? We are aware of the fact that we and our children are in holy covenant with God, and that fellow believers are members of Christ, but do we really believe, and *show* that we believe, that we are members "one of another" in Christ Jesus?

* * *

IN *Theologische Literaturzeitung* (No. 6, 1954, columns 364 to 368) Albrecht Oepke deals briefly with the ideas "people of God" and "body of Christ" in the Pauline epistles. As Oepke points out, the twentieth century has seen two extreme positions taken with respect to Paul's theology. A liberal idea still popular among some Liberals today holds that Paul was at heart a Hellenistic mystic who employed Jewish ideas only in his polemics. More recently, Paul his been treated as one who was essentially Jewish in his thinking. The "real" Paul is the Jewish Paul and to him the "people of God" idea is native and the "body of Christ" idea is acquired. The reverse is true in the estimation of those who consider Paul to be a Hellenist at heart.

Oepke presents his own solution of the problem. While holding that both "people of God" and "body of Christ" are natural to Paul's thought on the church, Oepke contends that "people of God" is fundamental to Paul's ecclesiology. This judgment is based on Paul's missionary preaching as it is reflected in Romans 1, I Cor. 15:1 ff., and II Cor. 5:18-21. The "body of Christ" idea can have meaning only if it is built upon the "people of God" idea and the doctrine of justification by faith. Oepke declares that fellowship between God and men must be restored before it can work itself out, because that fellowship has been disrupted by sin. According to Paul this restoration is not affected by changing something in man, but rather by this process: God sets aside the obstacle of sin through the gift of His Son and only then does he offer to man the hand of reconciliation. This is, claims Oepke, the very fountain-head of Paul's idea of the church and it cannot be obstructed without depriving the church as Paul conceives of it of its very life. This fact, however, does not mean that the "body of Christ" idea is really foreign to Paul. For the two ideas are not alternative possibilities. They form a synthesis, ". . . thus, however, that the People of God idea represents the root and stem, the Body of Christ idea the crown." Oepke concludes, "Thus it is not: People of God *or* Body of Christ, but rather: People of God *and* Body of Christ." (368)

This picture of Paul's ecclesiology is not complete. In fairness to Oepke it must be said that he did not intend to present the complete Pauline ecclesiology in one brief article. But even if we grant that Oepke has purposely limited the field of discussion, we cannot agree that the "people of God" idea is the fountain-head of Paul's idea of the Church. The fountain-head is found in the doctrine of election. That Paul's "missionary ecclesiology" emphasized the doctrines of justification by faith and the union of believing Jew and Gentile in one people of God needs no demonstration. But there is evidence that Paul did not wait long before he referred his converts "back" to election and "forward" to the "body of Christ" idea. In I Thess. 1:4 he speaks of election without explaining himself. He evidently presupposes an understanding of this strong term by the Thessalonian converts among whom he had labored for only a few weeks! Moreover, the admonitions in 4:1-9 and 5:12-22 presupposes an understanding of the idea of the church as the body of Christ even though the doctrine is not explicitly mentioned.

Election, justification and "body of Christ" are marvelously intertwined in Ephesians 1-4:16. In 1:4 and 11 Paul points out the elective origin of the church and indicates the reality of the Covenant of Redemption. In 2:19 the Ephesians are called "fellow-citizens with the saints." In 3:6 they are called "fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body." In this entire section the believer is taken from the recesses of the counsel of God to the historical reality of the New Testament Church in order that he may see what the angels see, "the manifold wisdom of God." Ephesians 2:10.

* * *

NO DOUBT the maturity of spiritual life required for an understanding of Paul's ecclesiology in its fullest expression is not to be expected in every member of the church. But the churches of Reformed persuasion in this country should pay more attention to the "Body of Christ" concept. As Prof. L. Berkhof has pointed out, dispensationalism

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People of God and Body of Christ — Continued

has emphasized this concept and has denied the validity of applying Old Testament names to the New Testament Church. This is manifestly contrary to the New Testament itself, see *Systematic Theology*, 3rd edition, pages 571 and 572. Thus, reaction to dispensationalism may account somewhat for our tardiness in emphasizing this aspect of ecclesiology. It is also true that those who would be faithful to Reformed theology in this country must stress the forensic aspect of the Covenant of Grace in order to combat the typical American aversion to juridical conceptions in theology, an aversion manifest especially in recent years. But preventive and polemic considerations should not move us to neglect an important aspect of New Testament ecclesiology. Calvin, in his *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter I, refers to the concept even though it might have weakened his polemic against the papacy.

One other factor must be mentioned which contributes to our slowness in developing the "body of Christ" idea. The Reformed community of Dutch origin has weakened itself by arguing about the Covenant of Grace from the patent fact of apostacy rather than stressing the promises of God and the need for personal response as these center in the sacrament of baptism. Fear of counting an apostate in the Covenant, ultimately considered, will also beget a fear of counting all brethren in the Church fellow members of Christ's body and treating them as such.

The identity of the "people of God" with the "body of Christ" has tremendous implications for those who hold to the doctrines of election and the Covenant of Grace. It is not the purpose of this article to list all of them. One implication should be mentioned, however. Christian education is *primarily* the obligation of teh covenant parents just as the care of widows is *primarily* the obligation of the covenant parents 5:4 and 8. But this does not mean that the whole body of believers does not have an obligation to help covenant parents give their children a Christian education (see Heidelberg Cat. Q. and A. 55). To an extent this fact is recognized. Churches receive offerings for Christian schools, and adults who do not have children or children of school age are called upon to support the Christian school financially. But support of Christian education is not merely a matter of dollars and cents. It involves intense personal interest and ardent prayer. Concern for the children of fellow believers will produce wide-spread support of Christian education. Concern on the part of Christian parents for the totality of kingdom needs will, likewise, move them to fulfill their primary obligations to the fullest extent possible, so that their brethren in the faith, while helping them, will not be burdened with concerns which are not primarily theirs. "Now ye are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof." (II Cor. 12:27) When this conviction is strong in the hearts of God's people, His kingdom moves forward under His blessing. When this conviction is lacking, no amount of *atomistic* covenant thinking and separatism can take its place as a dynamic force in God's kingdom.

John Milton and Reformed Literature

by GEORGE HARPER*

Most of us, in a pinch, could identify John Milton, and might even be able to quote a line or two from *Paradise Lost* or from the *Areopagitica*. Most of us, too, have a hazy recollection of his status as a Puritan poet and government functionary under Oliver Cromwell; at the least, we are aware that he was blind. But Reformed people ought really to know more of him, for his is a major poetic voice, and he has as sure a claim on our sensibilities as Dante has on Roman Catholic sensibilities. For Milton was involved in the reforming of a church and people, a reformation which proceeded not (always) wisely but perhaps too well, losing its momentum in sectarian wars of attrition. He is big, inexhaustibly big, a figure to be dealt with by historians, critics, and, not the least, theologians. One must go to school to the complete Milton to understand the English and, to some extent, the Continental, Reformation of the church and the people.

But my purpose here is to deal with Milton as a possible fecundator of Reformed literature. We have, as we all know, none of that at present about us, or issuing from us; various reasons, some good, have been advanced; various groundclearing statements have been published; small groups have essayed a beginning; but no Reformed literature of *relevance* has appeared in America or England (and translations from the Dutch do not solve the problem). We know hazily what it is we want — we are all quick to advance opinions about "mountain-top experiences," "integrated world-and-life views," — but we produce no minor Miltons, even in our minor world. I feel, though, that a consideration of Milton, not so much as operating poet, nor as thinker or politician, but as a *man* holding a fundamental attitude over against his abilities and his work, can, perhaps, show us a direction for Reformed literature.

A consideration of Milton will show us no ready and easy way to establish a peculiar kind of poem, novel, or Reformed commonwealth of letters, but it will, I feel, show us, not only what not to do, but also what attitude any future Reformed writers must come near to having. Others not Reformed have been to Milton before us, and have done much to help Milton show what we don't want; we, with our Reformed tradition behind us, and our Reformed sensibilities quick for a proper set or way of working, must go beyond these good studies and show the world what it is that Milton can do for literature in our time.

For an age in which little poetry is read, the constantly renewed supply of truisms about poetry is surprisingly large. Everyone knows now, or should have picked up, the truism that poetry

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is more than a substitute for music, landscape, moral discourse, or a sermon. Almost everyone knows that poetry had best be hard, clean of outline (the usual analogy in our time is with Neutra's or Wright's architecture), even stark; it must be realistic without being lugubrious, to fit an age which lives under mushroom clouds but doesn't want to be reminded of them; it must be manly about death, wars, poverty, cynical statesmanship, the new (juvenile) Machiavellianism of the Cohns, Schines, and Buckleys; almost everyone is now accustomed to a poetic landscape of stones, bones, leafshedding ailanthuses, canals, 'round behind gashouses, and the skull beneath the skin. And we know what we don't want; we don't want posturing (but we get the posture of anti-posture); we don't want jingo (but alas, do get cosmic jingo — witness Merton's Carmelite juvenilia); and above all, no Milton and no Miltonics. And what's best, we know our reasons. We don't want Miltonics because Milton has spawned Tennyson, and Tennyson, it is inescapably plain, is a failure as a poet. Metrically Milton is a master and yet a well of English defiled; we even know that there is much to be said for Miltonic organ-tones, but we also know (and act on this) that Milton has corrupted the poetic language for good, or had done so had not Messrs Pound and Eliot gone to school to Arnaut and La Forgue and Donne. Miltonics can be aped, and have been aped, and we have Tennyson; there is the situation at present, and the state of poetry in our time is experimental, interesting, and at times superficially healthy, and there is much to be said for the catharsis that language is undergoing in our time: language purification must go along with healthy ages of poetry (and perhaps theology).

The point is, though, we are getting no *Paradise Lost*, no *Divina Commedia*, no *Ten Satires* in our time. The reason, which we know, too, with our critical omniscience, but which we don't wish to own up to, is that we know too much about what we don't like in metrics (and we even are quite sure what we *do* like, but can't say this too loudly lest we shatter the illusion of the necessity of experimentation), but we don't know much about what we should like in fundamental attitudes, ways of looking at, not blackbirds, but the world which the blackbird and the poet and his family and his society and his church occupies, which his God made and controls.

What we are saying is that we are in an age of flexible and young language, ripe for use in large-size poetry, but we can't seem to find, even with our advanced intelligence about myths and symbols and how they operate, a big attitude, big enough to comprehend men, poets, beasts of the field and the air, nuclear fission, cities, seas, and the seven spheres, without which no poetry can be structured; no poetry of size, at least. The age cries for Milton-sized poetry, for a Miltonic attitude, and we can safely use them, for we now know enough language- and metrics-wise to be able to use the attitude without the danger of using the apeable metrics and vocabulary too. We are so well off, for that matter, in this business of metrics and language that we can easily afford to be indulgent, and even charitably imitative, of those large areas of precise and efficient metrics and style and vocabulary in Milton himself. What we must begin to consider more and more, then, is Milton, and possibly even Miltonics, as springs of poetic vigor, especially for any future Reformed artists.

For Milton has both a *technique* and a *morale*, an attitude, and both are necessary if Reformed literature is to get itself written at all. The morale is always with us, in essence, but it needs occasional rejuvenation. The technique is not with us — we must dig it out, and that means work, and charity for those who do it.

There is a danger in advocating, for Reformed people, a close study of Milton and Miltonics, for we are prone to assume too much about Milton. There is a racial memory of *Paradise Lost* — it is that vast poem on a scriptural theme which was, until recently, the companion to *Pilgrim's Progress* in every bare-minimum Calvinist library or reading-list — and we too easily assume that he is our *poet*, as Dante is the Catholics'. We are (and this is worse), prone, too, especially nowadays, to assume that in espousing Milton we are thereby asserting a decent, Reformed normativeness of taste in the arts. But it is not, after all, only Milton the man, nor Milton the poetic engrosser of Genesis 1, that we should be interested in; none of these concerns can give impetus or direction to new poetry, no matter what the state of readiness of the language, and no matter how close our world-view conforms to that of Milton (and it does with adjustments allowing for differences in science). It is, rather, the Miltonic attitude, that vast, often arbitrary, but really consistent, developed, intellectual Reformed attitude, that we should be interested in, interested to the extent that we once more read Milton, and read about his times, and in theological materials and cultural materials available to him and to our forebears and, significantly, to us. We shall produce no Reformed poetry, no literature at all, until we once again comprehend an attitude like Milton's. In failing to do that, and in not failing to absorb his style and his habit when making poetic noises, we'll only do again what the Tennyson's of the last 150 years have already so badly done.

THE fundamental fact of the Miltonic attitude, which is the most valuable fact, is Milton's unified awareness of the Holy Spirit. He was aware of the Holy Spirit's influence on his own life, and has several invocations to the Holy Spirit in his poetry, notably in the first book of the *Paradise Lost*. Another fact, closely allied to the first, is the fact of Milton's extreme respect for classical literature and for what he called 'pagan' philosophy. He respected and used them, and yet could be severe in his condemnation of them, because his active view of the role of the Holy Spirit in the world would not let him dismiss their realities as illusory, deliberately perjured so as to trap believers, or diabolically false; his was not the cheap comfort of mass condemnation on a specious 'principle' . . . he'd read them well, and with more than an eye for deviations from a norm not available to them in their time. Another fact is the fact of Milton's learning; fortunately he lived in an era when it was not held that erudition was the death of poetic spontaneity (he is much like Donne in this respect; both were learned, and both great poets, not despite their learning, but, in good part, in consequence of it), and had a catholic education which he augmented with a long period of quiet study at his father's home at Horton. Another fact: Milton's acute sense of calling, vocation. He was, he felt, *called* to be the great English Protestant poet, and that meant that he must prepare himself, not for life in a garret, or for a profession that would get him his daily bread so that he could take up writing as a hobby — this calling was religious, serious, complete, and Milton's view of poetry was as big as his sense of calling.

Milton and Reformed Literature — Continued

But another important fact: Milton had a great sense of structure, not only of the structures which he received and used (such as the epic structure or the Greek tragic play) but also of the structures given to the sensibility by a long and vigorous discipline of mind, body, and spirit. The key to understanding Milton is an awareness of his strong belief in the necessity of a disciplined art issuing from a disciplined sensibility in disciplined forms — it was this belief that gives him his angularity, or at least gives that angularity its public aspect. Milton is often known, if at all, as a misogynist who condemned his daughters to daily recitations in several foreign languages, but did not provide them with keys to the meaning of what they read. He is remembered as the bitter and rasp-tongued political pamphleteer; as the libeller of good King Charlie; as the man who objectified his own disappointment, and his own bitterness about his blindness, in a stark play about Samson; as the Protestant who couldn't stop protesting, and ended up being his own church — parson, choir, sexton and parish in one. What is forgotten is that his angularity is seldom personal; he is square and sharp precisely where his discipline make him square and sharp; his angularity is the angularity of his disciplines. It can be seen, too, on a charitable review of his work and life, that his heroic solidarity, which extends, perhaps too often, to his blank verse, is the solidarity of his disciplines, made heroic by the contexts and the genres in which he worked, compacted by the hard life of his times, which offered no quarter to the really disciplined man of letters (we recall, too, Donne's running fight with the intellectual, religious, moral and poetic imprecision of his somewhat earlier times.) But discipline for its own sake is always a counsel of despair, and the impression should not be left that Milton used his disciplines, wrote his verse, lived his life, out of a vast despair, a Promethean foolhardiness. He had a different motive, and it is this motive that bears stressing. His motive was to work as always in his "great task Masters eye," and the agent of his taskmaster with whom he was most intimately acquainted was the Holy Spirit:

And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost preferr
Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou know'st! Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad'st it pregnant: What in mee is dark
Illumin, what is low raise and support;
That to the highth of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justifie the wayes of God to men.

(PARADISE LOST, Bk 1)

and again:

On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues;
In darkness, and with dangers compast round,
And solitude; yet not alone, while thou
Visit'st my slumbers Nightly, or when Morn
Purples the East: still govern thou my Song . . .

(IBID., Bk VII)

What he was about doing, through his long and disrupted life, was the forging of suitable structures in language, which should receive their life from the Holy Spirit; he was the workman, roughing out the stone for the master-sculptor. All his learning, his metrical skill and experiments, his knowledge of dramatic timing (which was not negligible: see his mask, *Comus*) was put into this massive task. It is this insistence on doing the structure right, on bending the will to the formation of nearly perfect vehicles, that gives Milton his massiveness and hardness; but it his wise passiveness in inviting the Holy Spirit to take over the works of his mind that gives him, or rather his poetry, the paradoxical quality of beauty with strength. *Paradise Lost* cannot be lived with for long without one's discovering that the immense structure contains innumerable polished facets, which would be out of place in a structure less perfectly made. The description of paradise in Book IV of *Paradise Lost* is, by itself, as perfect a demonstration of English romantic evocation of beauty as can anywhere be found, yet it is not at all out of place, not at all gauche, for Milton has given it a setting in an ordered green oasis, which he allows Satan to see, so as to give added poignancy to Satan's despair at having forfeited Heaven; and the oasis is in turn related organically to the rest of the surroundings, and all to the theme itself, which is the unparadising of Adam and Eve, God's created images, themselves pristinely beautiful and good.

The way ahead, then, for any future Reformed literature of any merit, must lie in the direction pointed out (and taken, by a different route, now no longer available) by Milton. Reformed writers must, if they are to do anything at all, first attempt to follow Milton's disciplines, and then must ensure the best structure that can be made for the spirit's necessary working. The letter killeth, by itself, but it may be made ready for the spirit, which, if it finds things prepared, will give the needed life. Milton found this to be true: the long schooling, the Horton exile, the Italian journey, even the bitter years in Cromwell's government as Secretary for Foreign Tongues, the domestic disappointments, thwarted charity, poverty, the threat of imprisonment and death, the soaring Restoration of the Stuart kings and the Anglican prelates, and finally the blindness, which was a burden added to his later years when he was virtually without friends and family and amanuenses — all contributed their measure of discipline, were used, changed into structures, and appropriated by the spirit. Milton had his way, and that way is the way in which any future Reformed art must go.

IT'S RENEWAL TIME

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~~ Cullings from Our Columns ~~

"Our goal must be simply a Church which is at once holy and catholic."

JOHN KROMMINGA on *Ecumenicity*

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"It often means sacrifice to publish and edit an independent paper."

IDZERD VAND DELLEN on *A Free Press*

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"The emergency is passing in reference to the work of the Immigration Committee." ELCO OOSTENDORP on *Canada*

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"We found there (in Japan) a virile Reformed church which invited us to evangelize the nation in close cooperation with itself. . . ."

HENRY BRUINOOGE on *Japan*

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"Can we not expect that real and lasting progress toward the full solution of our union problems will be made through free and open discussion in a non-official, non-ecclesiastical way?

SIMON DE VRIES on *Labor*

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"All Ceylon needs is workers, Ministers, and an Educator."

CLARENCE VAN ENS on *Ceylon*

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". . . The attack on orthodoxy used to be made in the name of science, philosophy, or reason. It is now made in the name of religion."

HENRY ZYLSTRA on *The Religious Situation*

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"The question that we face in America is this: Is it necessary and right to endeavor, even in principle, to bring into being the kind of religio-political division that exists in Holland?"

HARRY BOER on *The Three Pillars*

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"Christians should do nothing through faction. A faction is a futile effort to socialize selfishness."

JOHN WEIDENAAR on the *Unity of the Church*

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"And shall we hope that we will awaken again to a recognition that we still have a call to India from which we cannot quite so easily be discharged?" GEORGE STOB on *The India Surrender*

". . . We should never forget that a poor argument for the faith will usually do more damage than a good argument against it." CECIL DE BOER on *The Language of Faith*

* * * *

"It has always struck me as a faintly ridiculous oddity that our national anthem begins with the shrill, slangy ejaculation, 'Oh, say!' — words introducing a song which only a superbly gifted soprano can sing."

JOHN TIMMERMAN on the *Love of Country*

* * * *

"These are the days in which a generation with renewed, unshakeable faith can do great things for God and expect great things from God. Let this experience stir us, mobilize us, drive us."

DICK L. VAN HALSEMA on *Home Missions*

* * * *

"Calvin considered the eating and drinking of the bread and wine in the sacrament to be truly and really *efficacious* symbols."

LEWIS B. SMEDES on *Calvin and the Lord's Supper*

* * * *

"The duty of the Christian in the USA, it would seem to me, would be to work for a Christian society which is shaped and molded by Christian ideas, but which tolerates other ideologies . . ." DIRK JELLEMA on *Christian Social Action*

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"Missions does not mean simply "witnessing." Missions means witnessing with a view to gathering converts into the *visible, instituted* empirically existing body of Christ."

HARRY BOER on *The French Worker Priests*

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"The Christian's unremitting opposition to the theoretical and practical aspects of Communism implies also his critique of those conditions and those thought-patterns which foster it. . . . His opposition is therefore persistent, consistent, and all-embracing. . . . The Christian needs to take care, however, that he does not identify himself with everything that Communism opposes."

LESTER DE KOSTER on *Communism*

"The fact remains that the so-called "conservative" seminaries have not escaped the general debility to which all education seems addicted. . . . Their very character as *conservative* schools may stand in the way of improvement. They want to remain precisely where and what they are. . . . They are satisfied in "holding their own," and spend most of their energies in defence. They are almost exclusively apologetic."

HENRY SCHULTZE on *Theological Education*

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"We cannot, and do not, expect of the clergy the erudition and scholarship which we can rightfully demand of the theologian; but surely the minimum requirement is theological literacy, and it is this end which the study of ecclesiastical Latin serves."

ROBERT OTTEN on *The Way to Theology*

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"Unless Bible study can be as much a formal, academic discipline as geography and English and arithmetic it will be poorly taught."

NICHOLAS H. BEVERSLUIS on *Bible in Our Schools*

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"What the World Council may become in the future no man knows. As of now, it is not a Super-Church. If at this time it would begin to function as a Super-Church, it would quickly dig its own grave."

JAMES DAANE on *Evanston*

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"It is to be hoped that our schools will come to recognize foreign language study as a part of the thorough furnishing of the man of God unto every good work." CLARENCE BOERSMA on *Foreign Languages in Our Schools*

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"One historical birth and one only has fully satisfied the oracle of Isa. 7:14, and that is the birth of Jesus Christ." F. F. BRUCE on *Isaiah's Virgin Oracle*

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HAROLD DEKKER on *Home Missions*

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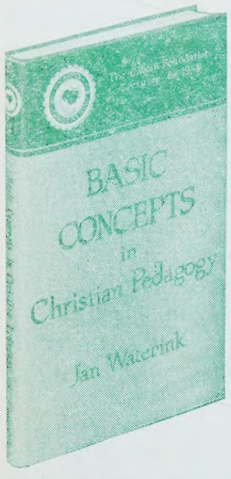

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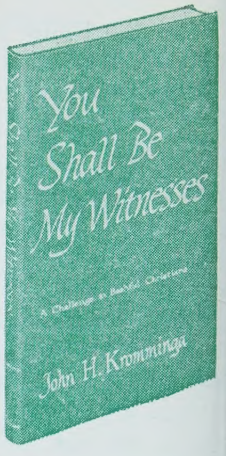

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